

## Why GAO Did This Study

Over 3,600 people in this country died in 2009 as a result of crashes involving large commercial trucks and buses. Until recently the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and its state partners tracked the safety of motor carriers—companies that own these vehicles—by conducting resource-intensive compliance reviews of a small percentage of carriers. In 2004, FMCSA began its Compliance, Safety, and Accountability (CSA) program. CSA is intended to identify and evaluate carriers and drivers posing high safety risks. FMCSA has focused on three key CSA oversight activities to evaluate carriers: a new Safety Measurement System (SMS) using more roadside inspection and other data to identify at-risk carriers; a wider range of “interventions” to reach more at-risk carriers; and using SMS data to suspend unfit carriers. FMCSA expected to fully implement CSA by late 2010. FMCSA also plans to separately use data to rate drivers’ fitness.

In this report, GAO assessed: (1) the status of the CSA rollout and issues that could affect it and (2) CSA’s potential to improve safety. GAO reviewed CSA plans and data, visited eight states, and interviewed FMCSA, state, and industry officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FMCSA (1) develop a plan to implement driver fitness ratings in a reasonable timeframe and (2) regularly report to Congress on problems and delays in implementing CSA and plans to mitigate risks. FMCSA provided technical comments and agreed to consider the recommendations.

View [GAO-11-858](#) or key components. For more information, contact Susan Fleming at (202) 512-2834 or [flemings@gao.gov](mailto:flemings@gao.gov).

## MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY

### More Assessment and Transparency Could Enhance Benefits of New Oversight Program

## What GAO Found

Close to a year after the anticipated completion date, FMCSA has partially implemented two of the three planned CSA carrier oversight activities—the new SMS and an expanded set of interventions—in all states; however, it still cannot use CSA safety ratings to get unsafe carriers off the road because it has not completed a rulemaking needed to do so. Specifically,

- FMCSA implemented SMS in 2010, as scheduled, to replace the prior system, known as SafeStat. The system allows FMCSA to evaluate, score and rank the safety of carriers and identify at-risk carriers needing intervention. However, states have had to expend resources to respond to carriers that have requested reviews of inspection violations shown in the system.
- FMCSA has implemented most of the expanded array of enforcement interventions for at-risk carriers, including issuing warning letters and initiating focused reviews of carriers’ safety operations that allow FMCSA to reach more at-risk carriers; however, it has delayed implementation of two interventions—Off-site Investigations and Cooperative Safety Plans—because the technology needed to implement them will not be completed until at least 2012.
- FMCSA has not yet begun using SMS data to suspend unfit carriers, and is 2 years behind in issuing and completing the rulemaking needed to use these data instead of a time-consuming compliance review. FMCSA expects to finalize the rulemaking in 2013.

In addition, FMCSA has had mixed success managing implementation of CSA oversight activities thus far. FMCSA performed well in conducting outreach to carriers and responding to stakeholder concerns, but experienced difficulties in realigning its workforce for CSA and adapting staff to CSA’s new safety paradigm. FMCSA has not provided comprehensive information to Congress and the public on the risks associated with either the delayed carrier intervention activities or operational and management issues that arose during implementation and its plans to mitigate these risks; thus Congress may lack information needed to make decisions about CSA. Moreover, FMCSA has taken initial steps to separately measure drivers’ fitness to operate trucks and buses by seeking new legislative authority to prohibit unsafe drivers from operating in interstate commerce. However, FMCSA has not specified time frames for developing this measurement, how it will ultimately be used, or whether delaying the implementation will affect safety.

It is too early to definitively assess the extent to which CSA will improve truck and bus safety nationwide. Data from a pilot test suggest that SMS and the expanded range of intervention tools provides a more effective means of contacting these carriers and addressing their safety issues. However, CSA’s success depends on the availability of sufficient inspection data for carriers. For example, small carriers are less likely to receive enough roadside inspections to be scored and ranked in SMS. FMCSA has begun but not finished performance measures for CSA and has not yet collected the data needed to use them, so the extent that it can show CSA improves safety is unclear.